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ABSTRACT

Seven sentence combining activities designed to be stimulating and effective for college-level Japanese students of English as a Second Language are described. It is also demonstrated that a wide range of subjects can provide viable and engaging topics for the activities. The exercises include the following: (1) combining sentences provided into a smooth paragraph; (2) using connecting words, relative clauses, and prepositional phrases to join sentences fluently; (3) rewriting a passage in a better way; (4) putting sentences in order, connecting them smoothly, omitting unnecessary content, and adding needed information; (5) choosing a topic sentence and selecting and placing relevant sentences, using the student's own ideas or examples; (6) constructing a well-ordered paragraph from given sentences, deleting information as needed and comparing, contrasting, and giving reasons and examples; and (7) combining sets of sentences into paragraphs. The seven activities progress from highly signalled, mechanical exercises to less signalled, more open activities. The exercises seek to replicate the use of grammar during the composing process and to aid Japanese students in developing their own intuitions about English grammar; they also give practice in the rhetoric of written English. Such activities are recommended for a supportive role in writing classes, not replacing other valuable activities such as intensive and extensive reading, free journal writing, and timed writing exercises. (MSE)

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Sentence Combining Activities for Japanese University Students

Brant M. Kresovich

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Introduction

Sentence combining is based on the theory that it allows students "to manipulate syntax without having to contend with some of the other creative aspects involved in the composing process" (Shortreed & Kelly, 1983). Sentence combining, then, emphasizes one specific skill necessary in writing a first or second language: the use of varied grammatical structures and patterns to form clear sentences.

Few studies designed to determine the effects of sentence combining activities on the writing ability of students in ESL/FL settings have been conducted up to the present. However, the results of these few seem to indicate sentence combining has a positive effect on students' writing. Crymes (1971) reported a study in which ESL students who had written sentence combining exercises practicing nominalization wrote compositions using more nominalizations than a control group. Perron (1974) conducted a study which concluded that when used with various language learning games and activities, sentence combining expedited syntactic growth. Combs (1975) reported that even after a two-month period of no sentence combining activities, an experimental group still maintained writing gains. Finally, Klassen (1977) reported that a comprehensive sentence combining program in an ESL intensive course for university-aged students substantially improved syntactic maturity and that this progress was retained after a period of no sentence combining exercises.

There have been numerous criticisms of sentence combining. In particular, Zamel (1980) issued two cogent warnings to ESL/FL teachers. The first was that an ESL/FL student might not have the linguistic repertoire or "key concepts relating to the grammar of a sentence" to benefit from sentence combining practice. Therefore, teachers should use grammar instruction in order to provide paradigms which students may utilize to analyze and discuss sentences created in these exercises. The second caution was that ESL/FL teachers must remember sentence combining emphasizes only one component of writing (syntax) rather than the whole process of writing.

Zamel's first concern should be deeply considered by English teachers at all levels in Japan. Lower and intermediate learners do indeed lack the grammatical concepts that

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make sentence combining a beneficial exercise. Furthermore, too many Japanese students enter colleges linguistically crippled because they have studied English primarily to pass examinations based exclusively on the grammar-translation method. In fact, university freshmen and sophomores can recognize many advanced grammatical structures but when called upon to produce these same structures to express their own ideas and opinions, they have great difficulty in creating accurate, fluent sentences with these same advanced points. Therefore, much of the work done by college teachers of English composition is remedial (Reid, 1983) and tends to address typical grammatical errors in English made by Japanese ESL/FL students (Bryant, 1984). My own experience teaching at the university level in Japan has shown that students often need some remedial work with coordinating conjunctions (*and, or, but, so*); subordinate and noun clauses; and phrases using prepositions, appositives, infinitives, and gerunds. This necessary remedial work is done in my classes with the help of the text, *Keys to Composition* by Johnston and Zukowski/Faust, which contains very helpful review chapters. This practice benefits the students by giving them the ability to produce advanced grammatical patterns and structures.

Zamel's other warning that sentence combining emphasizes only one aspect of the process of writing also has to be pondered by teachers thinking of using this kind of exercise. There is a possibility that sentence combining may become mechanical and dull. Moreover, the students' ability to create and to express themselves may not be stimulated by combining sentences written by strangers. Therefore, teachers should develop exercises whose topics are interesting to the students and whose solutions are stylistically satisfying sentences (Hunt, 1978). Furthermore, sentence combining need not be tightly controlled grammar drills. Shortreed and Kelly (1983) and Horowitz (1987) assert that the students can also practice composing skills such as revision, embellishment, deletion, and manipulation of entire paragraphs in sentence combining. The former also contended that "when longer passages of discourse are used sentence combining practice at least partially duplicates (by no means completely) the actual use of grammar during the composing process."

Purpose

The purpose of this brief paper is to present a number of sentence combining activities for Japanese university students. I will show that such exercises need not be bland, uninteresting grammar drills. They can certainly be made stimulating while remaining effective in teaching composing skills. Inspired by the work of Horowitz

(1987) which presented various formats for these exercises, I will also show that a wide variety of subjects can provide viable and engaging topics for sentence combining activities.

The Exercises

The format of the first exercise is what usually occurs to teachers when they think of sentence combining. The form is mechanical, but at the early stages of a writing class it is effective in encouraging students to become accustomed to a new type of exercise. Students are able to develop confidence because this exercise has many clear signals that give clues concerning how to join the sentences. Students also get a much needed review of the coordinating conjunctions. They receive preparation in writing organized descriptions and definitions. Finally, the topic is on an aspect of listening comprehension that may be new to them.[1]

Combine the following sentences to write a smooth paragraph. Pay attention to the use of the connecting words *and, or, but,* and *so.* Let's do the topic sentence together as an example.

1. Becoming a good listener is difficult.
2. One must not concentrate on one's own problems.
3. One must not concentrate on one's own worries.
4. One must not concentrate on one's own answers.
5. One must not concentrate on one's own self-image.

Now do the rest by yourself.

6. A good listener is relaxed.
7. A good listener is honest.
8. A good listener knows when to respond.
9. But a good listener knows when to be silent.
10. A good listener knows when to share information.
11. But a good listener also knows when to ask a question.
12. A good listener pays attention to something.
13. A good listener pays attention to the nuances of a conversation.
14. A good listener is not passive.
15. A good listener is not talkative.
16. Or a good listener is not pushy.
17. If a person can forget his own worries, two good things will happen.
18. And if a person can pay attention to the world around him, two good things will happen.
19. His self-image will improve.
20. And he will become a good listener.

The second exercise is also signalled in that the directions clearly suggest the use of connecting words and relative clauses, and the sentences to be joined are all under one number. This exercise also gives students the opportunity to organize an explanation.

The topic is of interest to English majors.[2]

Combine the following sentences to construct a smooth paragraph. Use connecting words, relative clauses, and prepositional phrases to join the sentences fluently. Feel free to omit words but do not add or delete any information.

1. Anthony Flenley, a high school teacher in Osaka, concludes in his survey.
   He concludes that the use of innovative English language teaching methods is discouraged.
   They are discouraged for the following reasons.
2. First, there is a strong tradition.
   The tradition is of the teacher as an expert who gives knowledge.
   At the same time the learner passively receives it.
3. Second, teachers have little time to study and experiment with new methods.
   The first reason is they have many other duties.
   The second reason is that they don't have enough contact with students.
4. Third, some teachers face protest from students.
   The teachers try new methods.
   The students are used to grammar-translation.
5. Fourth, older teachers feel no need.
   They do not change the way they teach.
6. Younger teachers have little power.
   They do not have the power to start discussions of new methods.
7. Finally, innovation has many risks.
   There is a poor entrance exam pass rate.
   There is conflict with students and other teachers.
   There is frustration at the inability to change the system in any constructive way.

The third exercise is more open because it contains less signalling and allows a greater number of combinations. Students must also omit redundant information. This exercise is used in units that cover giving directions and describing traits. As many students enjoy police and spy thrillers, this topic is engaging to learners.[3]

Rewrite the following passage in a better way. You may rearrange and change sentence structure. You should add any necessary connecting words and phrases. You must not add or omit any information, but you should omit unnecessary words and phrases.

This exercise is based on the advice of a Japanese spy of the 1930s and 1940s. His name was Ozaki Hotsumi and he worked with Richard Sorge, a German who spied for the Russians. Both were caught by the Kempeitai and hanged during World War II. This information is from the book *Foreign Devil* by Richard Hughes.

Somebody wants to be a good spy. There are certain necessary characteristics to be a good spy. First, never seem eager to get information. If you seem eager to get information, important people will not speak to you if they think you want to collect information. Second, you should give an impression. The

impression is that you have more information than your informant. The other will be happy to give you information. If he thinks he will receive some information in return, he will give information happily. Third, informal dinner parties are excellent settings. They are good settings to gather information. Fourth, you should have close connections. These connections should be with important organizations. Above all, you must make people trust you. If people have confidence in you, you can ask questions naturally. And if people trust you, you can obtain good information. To be a good spy you must be a good source. You must be a good source of information. These guidelines are also good for another occupation. They are good for journalists.

The fourth exercise calls for students to put the sentences in order, connect them smoothly, omit unnecessary content, and add any information they think germane to the issue of school rules in Japanese schools, a topic of which they cannot help but have experience.' This exercise is given in units where exemplification is the organizational pattern to be learned.

Select related sentences from below and combine them. Rewrite the sentences to form a paragraph.

STRICT SCHOOL RULES IN JAPAN

Uniforms must be worn.

Also, there are rules concerning shoes.

The shoes must be inexpensive.

The shoes must be white.

Bags must be of a certain thickness.

Some students dislike these rules.

School rules in Japan regulate almost all aspects of student life.

A girl's bangs cannot reach her eyebrows.

Of course, boys cannot have moustaches or beards.

Some schools require students to wear school uniforms during their free time.

There are rules concerning accessories.

Girls cannot wear jewelry of any kind.

Bags might have to be a certain color.

People have rules for most situations in life.

There are rules concerning hair length.

Her hair at the back cannot cover the nape of her neck.

Some students want to see these rules changed.

There are a number of reasons why teachers want strict rules.

The hair length of boys cannot be more than 2 cm.

There are rules on clothes.

In the fifth exercise students may choose a topic sentence. They must then select sentences relevant to the subject, place them in order, connect them smoothly, and embellish the information with their own ideas or examples. This activity is used for practice in giving reasons and examples. Finally, such cultural topics are almost always interesting to college students.[5]

Write a well-ordered paragraph by choosing a topic sentence from those below and then selecting appropriate reasons to support the thesis from the notes below.

1. Foreign visitors to the USA may be shocked at the small vocabularies Americans seem to have.
2. Foreigners may be shocked at how easily Americans are embarrassed.
3. It seems that Japanese friends can enjoy each other's company without much talking, but many Americans regard silence with discomfort.

* * *

Americans feel very uncomfortable when foreigners ask strange questions ("How old are you?") or raise sensitive topics like appearance ("How white your skin is!" or "How tall you are!").

Surprised, the Japanese said, "Of course not."

They may be shocked at American brusqueness.

But the reality is that many Americans are as sensitive as another thin-skinned group, the Japanese.

One Japanese told the story of when silence extended for a time while driving on a long trip, his American friend asked, "Are you mad at me?"

Americans may feel lonely in silence so they turn on a radio or TV to fill the silence.

Or, Americans might feel surprised or embarrassed when they accept gifts because they usually have nothing to give in return.

Perhaps such direct people prefer to be regarded as plain-spoken rather than polished or polite.

The Japanese are accustomed to using long, polite phrases in conversation.

For example, many Americans tend to answer with short words like "Sure," "Yup," or "Nope."

Some Americans do indeed become silent when they disagree because they feel it is impolite to argue further.

For example, when complimented, many Americans smile stiffly and mutter, "Thank you," or "Not at all" because they simply do not know what to say.

Americans have a world-wide reputation for being friendly and informal.

Many Americans are blunt.

The American replied, "Then, why aren't you talking? Why are you giving me the silent treatment?"

Or they talk on and on about trivial matters in conversation.

Thus, although Americans may use silence, they don't always like it.

The sixth exercise gives students more freedom to choose a topic, add or delete

information, and combine ideas in various ways. This activity is used to practice comparing, contrasting, giving reasons, and examples. Based on information culled from past students' compositions, this is a topic students find stimulating.

Use the sentences below to construct a well-ordered paragraph. Connect sentences smoothly and feel free to omit irrelevant or repetitive information.

Taking part in an English language play can give students practice in pronunciation, especially stress and intonation.
Reading the play closely makes students understand the nuance of new words.
Students can study Western gestures.
They learn how to get along in a group to accomplish something difficult and important.
They learn responsiblity: discipline to learn lines and be on time for rehearsals.
They give too much time to the play and neglect their studies and chores at home.
They have no time to relax so they damage their health, sleep in class, and lose concentration for studying.
Although there are various disadvantages, the advantages make participating in the play well worth the time and effort.
Another advantage is the opportunity to learn about another culture.
Putting on a play is not only time-consuming, but it is expensive.
Another advantage is that students show publicly that they are improving their English.
Joining in a play can motivate learners to improve their English language ability.
Plays fail on account of a lack of cooperation among the players.
Students get to know each other well by practicing a play over a long period of time.
Another disadvantage is that there is much tiresome work: selling tickets, designing the program, getting advertisers for the program, and preparing stage sets and props.

The seventh exercise gives students sentences to combine to form short paragraphs. Many students have little idea when to begin and end paragraphs, so this exercise gives helpful practice in paragraphing appropriately. The topic concerns an issue of interest to those who wish to become English teachers.[6]

Combine the sentences; form them into paragraphs.

I

The Japanese study English for six years.
They study it in junior and senior high school.
Their ability to speak English is poor.
There are two main reasons for this lack of ability.

II

The first is that students study English to do something.
They study in order to do well on written tests.
High school students need English to pass the all-important university entrance test.
Teachers are under pressure to teach grammar, vocabulary, and reading-translation skills.
The exams rarely test pronunciation, speaking, or writing.
Teachers do not emphasize these skills.

III

The second reason is that many teachers use the Grammar-Translation approach.
This is a way of language teaching.
It uses the students' mother tongue.
English classes in Japan are taught in Japanese.
Teaching entails two things.
One is that long explanations of difficult grammar points are given.
Another is that new words are given in long lists, not meaningful sentences.
Of course, the name indicates certain skills are stressed.
Translation skills are stressed.
Some skills are less important in this approach.
These skills are listening, pronunciation, and speaking.

IV

The Japanese speak English poorly.
Their English education system stresses test-taking skills.
Their English education stresses translation skills.
The Japanese are perhaps the most capable learners in the world.
Once their English education begins to teach aural-oral skills, something will happen.
Their ability to speak and comprehend English will improve.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The seven activities here progressed from highly signalled, mechanical exercises to less signalled, more open activities in order to show that sentence combining does not necessarily have to be a mere listing of 10 to 20 sentences which then must be thrust together in ways specified by the teacher. The exercises here seek to replicate the use of grammar during the composing process and to aid Japanese students in developing their own intuitions about English grammar. The exercises also give practice in the rhetoric

of written English.

Sentence combining should play a supporting role in writing classes (Kameen, 1978). It should not replace valuable activities such as intensive and extensive reading of model paragraphs and essays, free writing in journals, timed exercises to develop fluency and the process of writing compositions, stories, essays, and reports. Even Zamel (1980) said that sentence combining is one of the best ways to help students learn about the grammar of a sentence. Yet, sentence combining can also be an effective strategy in teaching students how to organize paragraphs.

The intangible benefits of sentence combining are clear. According to an informal survey of 22 English Composition I sophomore English majors in June, 1989, a clear majority (60% and above) believed the exercises were good practice in using English vocabulary, writing faster, organizing ideas, and forming longer sentences. Over 85% felt the exercises helped them practice English written style and improve their writing. However, more research is needed to identify the tangible benefits of sentence combining. For example, we need to know, of the various types of sentence combining activities, which are most effective in improving syntax and organization. Writing teachers must continue research concerned with ascertaining the most reliable and valid methods of evaluating students' writing. I humbly submit this work in the hope of stimulating discussion of these issues and receiving suggestions on how to develop such exercises to give Japanese learners the most benefit.

Notes

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my reader, Prof. A. P. Jenkins, for his suggestions. I must also express my gratitude for the kind attention and pertinent comments given by the members of the Foreign Language & Literature Society of Okinawa when this paper was presented in July, 1989. Of course, any remaining errors are my own responsibility.

[1]The information in this exercise is based on a pop psychology piece in a magazine such as *Redbook* or *Psychology Today*. Unfortunately, the source is untraceable.

[2]The information is based on Flenley, 1988.

[3]The source is Hughes, 1988.

[4]The examples of school rules are taken from students' compositions.

[5]The main points are from Lanier, 1981.

[6]The main points were inspired by Imamura, 1978.

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